



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS<sup>®</sup> OF MARYLAND, INC.

## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

### **HB 1009 – TASK FORCE TO STUDY INCREASED VOTER PARTICIPATION**

#### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

#### **BY: BARBARA SCHNACKENBERG AND NANCY SORENG CO-PRESIDENTS**

#### **DATE: MARCH 2, 2016**

The mission of the League of Women Voters is the encouragement of the informed and active participation of citizens in government. One of our core values is that the responsibility of good government rests on the shoulders of its citizens, and voting is the ultimate expression of that responsibility. We are very supportive of the creation of a Task Force to Study Increased Voter Participation.

The League understands and appreciates that the scope of the study of the proposed Task Force is more limited than other legislation currently being considered by the General Assembly to create a Commission on Voting, Openness, Transparency, and Equality in Elections (HB 592). The Task Force proposed in HB 1009 will look at vote-by-mail options, expansion of Election Day registration and the expansion of early voting locations, days and hours. Each of these issues are worthy of a close look by legislators and Maryland citizens as potential efforts to increase voter participation, and these particular issues can easily be addressed in a non-partisan manner by the Task Force members.

We are not naïve and we comprehend that there are many reasons why voters do or do not engage in a particular election. However, a Maryland voter participation rate of a little over 44% in the 2014 general election is a sign of problems that may be fixed by making voting more accessible through Election Day Registration or a robust vote-by mail opportunities. While more than 50% of registered voters participated in that election in ten counties, the participation rate in three of the largest jurisdictions was in the 30-40% range, a rate that cannot be sustained in a healthy democracy.

States with vote-by-mail have reported increased voter participation rates, but this solution is one which needs to be studied and assessed for security and cost efficiency. The same is true for expanded early voting, which has shown increased popularity in Maryland. The League is supporting current legislation in the General Assembly to achieve Automatic Voter Registration, but should that legislation not pass, clearly Election Day registration, with security issues addressed, is a positive and important option.

The League supports HB 1009 and we urge this Committee to report favorably on this legislation, which will result in a report that can inform legislators and the public about viable changes to our election policies that could increase voter participation in our state to levels that will ensure truly representative elected officials.